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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 4 November 1992, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. AL-HADDAD (Yemen)
(Vice-President)

- Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development [79] (continued)

  (a) Report of the Conference

  (b) Report of the Secretary-General

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In the absence of the President, Mr. Al-Haddad (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 79 (continued)

REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

(a) REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE (A/CONF.151/26 (vol.I-IV and vol.II/Corr.1)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/598 and Add.1)

Mr. ERDENECHULUUN (Mongolia): We are embarking upon a challenging and equally promising post-Rio road, and the forty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly is called upon to take the first steps designed to fulfil the obligations that the nations of the world collectively undertook in the documents adopted at the Conference. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) will undoubtedly go down in the annals of history as one of the most remarkable of gatherings in the magnitude of its concerns.

The Rio Conference laid down a conceptual and practical basis for our future endeavours. It also signified the beginning of a new global partnership. For this we are profoundly indebted to Mr. Maurice Strong, Secretary-General of UNCED, and Ambassador Tommy Koh of Singapore for their tireless efforts, dedicated commitment and brilliant leadership during the preparatory process and the Rio Conference itself.

We are especially grateful to the Government of Brazil for the excellent arrangements that in no small measure contributed to making that historic Conference a success.

We also thank the Rapporteur, the Foreign Minister of Algeria, for his report on the Rio Conference.

(Mr. Erdenechuluun, Mongolia)

We listened with great interest and anticipation to the comprehensive and thought-provoking statement by the Secretary-General. My delegation commends him for the reports concerning the institutional arrangements to follow up UNED.

The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan has already spoken on behalf of the Group of 77. Therefore I will confine my remarks to a few points of particular interest to my delegation.

The Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and all other documents mark a significant change in mankind's attitude towards nature and environment. The Rio Conference has made it distinctly clear that development can no longer be divorced from environment.

Having put this interrelationship at the top of the agenda, the world community has come to realize that an advance of any given country is essentially dependent upon the collective efforts of both affluent and developing nations.

With the end of the cold war and the diminishing of the threat of direct military confrontation between major Powers, the environmental problems and their potential catastrophic consequences today represent a greater security risk for every nation. It has become incumbent upon each and every country to articulate its own Agenda 21.

Rio has demonstrated anew the unique role of the United Nations, and it is only here that we can make our joint efforts work.

Mongolia shares the considered view of many that the momentum generated in Rio must not be lost, and that commitment to sustainable development has to be translated into practical action.

(Mr. Erdenechuluun, Mongolia)

The issue of the highest priority at this session is, of course, the establishment of a comprehensive institutional framework to follow up UNCED. My delegation is gratified to note that the views of the Secretary-General on the procedural and organizational modalities of the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development, which will have a vital role to play in monitoring and implementing Agenda 21, lay down a sound basis for constructive deliberations and early action.

My delegation is in full agreement with the view of many that the membership of the Commission is to be determined on the basis of equitable geographical distribution and representation is to be at the highest possible level. In order to ensure that the views of all are adequately taken into account, non-member States should be given an opportunity to participate in the work of the Commission as observers. It is also important that the relevant intergovernmental organizations, both within and outside the United Nations, as well as non-governmental organizations and private institutions, contribute to the work of the Commission, as envisaged in Agenda 21.

My delegation would like to see the new Commission have distinct functions, concrete agendas and an effective organizational structure in order to avoid duplication of work.

In addition to its functions foreseen in Agenda 21, the Commission on Sustainable Development will in our view also provide a crucial forum for ongoing North-South dialogue on environment and development issues and on the linkages between them. Furthermore it will be the most effective mechanism for ensuring adherence to the principles of environmentally sound sustainable development.

(Mr. Erdenechuluun, Mongolia)

The success of the UNCED decisions undoubtedly will depend upon the financial commitments of the industrialized countries. It is common knowledge that the developing countries will not be able to cope with the multitude of problems on their own unless new and additional resources are mobilized. It is especially related to the need to obtain environmentally sound technologies. We welcome the pledges recently announced by the major industrialized countries, as well as those made in Rio.

We also welcome the process of the restructuring of the Global Environment Facility, and hope that it will give developing countries broader participation in its decision making procedure.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on its part, could play an important role with its unique comparative advantages. We wholeheartedly welcome the UNDP's new "Capacity 21", designed to support developing countries in formulating environmental policies and legislation and creating their national technical and administrative structures.

The United Nations regional commissions have an important role to play in facilitating regional and/or subregional cooperation. We believe that countries themselves should initiate cooperative action that could result in the creation of specific regional and/or subregional mechanisms to deal with issues related to development and environment.

We are encouraged by the statement made in Rio by the President of the World Bank on "Earth increment".

We hope that early commitments sufficient to start the speedy implementation of Agenda 21 will be made and that political will and a sense of responsibility will prevail at this session of the General Assembly.

(Mr. Erdenechuluun, Mongolia)

The question of particular importance to my delegation is the establishment of an open-ended intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration and adoption of an international convention to combat desertification, particularly in Africa, with a view to finalizing such a convention by June 1994.

The report of the Secretary-General in document A/47/393 contains specific requirements and arrangements for the implementation of the plan of action of Agenda 21 in the areas of drought and desertification.

The severity and immensity of this problem requires of us urgent and decisive action at this session of the General Assembly.

The Government of Mongolia attaches great importance to environmental issues, and they form an integral part of its socio-economic activities. A new Ministry of Environment Protection has been created. The Government's environmental policy places particular emphasis on the introduction of environmentally sound technology. The newly elected Parliament of Mongolia is expected to ratify the Conventions on climate change and biodiversity later this year.

In conclusion, I express my delegation's hope that our deliberations will result in practical actions, and, especially, the setting up of a Commission on Sustainable Development so that it would start substantive work early next year.

Mr. OLHAYE (Djibouti): The task before us is daunting as we move along the road from Rio in concretizing or translating the accomplishments of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) into real programmes and projects. We cannot afford to fail to devise an effective follow-up mechanism along the lines of the firm agenda or the comprehensive framework we established.

The euphoria generated as the Earth Summit drew to a close on June 14 this year must be kept alive as the beacon of hope against an ecological catastrophe. As the visionary, indefatigable UNCED Secretary-General, Mr. Maurice Strong, put it in his closing statement to the Conference:

> "This process has been a profoundly important human experience from which none of us can emerge unchanged. The world will not be the same; international diplomacy and the United Nations will not be the same; and the prospects for the Earth's future cannot be the same."

The excruciating, often long and stifling meetings at Rio eventually succeeded in laying down new, far-reaching commitments for international cooperation in environment and development culminating in the adoption of important policy documents: the Rio Declaration, the statement on forest principles and Agenda 21, perhaps the principal environment and development action or work plan.

Not every commitment in Agenda 21, however, is hard, conclusive or even certain. I refer specifically to the financial resources and transfer of technology mechanisms. Such lingering doubts on the part of the poor nations of the world are not groundless, given the bitter past experiences of unfulfilled promises and scuttled expectations. The serious concerns about desertification, poverty and other development problems facing poor countries,

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particularly in Africa, have in the past been invariably overlooked amid all the attention devoted to more global environmental problems such as climate change and ozone depletion. Lamenting this usual neglect, an African policy-maker had to remark:

> "For the majority of African countries daily confronted by the problems of thirst and hunger, the struggle against environmental degradation is a struggle for survival. For us, the problem of environmental protection is a problem of development, a problem of the sustainable management of natural resources".

The fragile consensus crafted in Rio must not be allowed to fall victim to renewed rancour, insensitivity or incoherence. Despite the extensive body of compromises, often short of much substance and political commitments, the final Agenda 21 provides a satisfactory framework for future cooperation. It has indeed set the stage for action. Towards this end, the recommendations contained in the chapter on international institutional arrangements call for strengthening the capacity of the United Nations system itself to address such challenges, with the establishment during this session of the General Assembly of a permanent high-level Commission on Sustainable Devlopment, whose role would be:

> "to ensure the effective follow-up of the Conference, as well as to enhance international cooperation and rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues and to examine the progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and international levels".
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> (A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. III), para 38.11)

In this respect, we welcome the report of the Secretary-General, which provides comprehensive recommendations on the shape and scope of the

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Commission - its mandate and functions, composition, funding, secretariat, and coordination mechanisms.

The momentum of Rio ought to be maintained and, therefore, the establishment of a strong, versatile Commission with vision and vitality cannot be overemphasized. The Secretary-General's keen interest and direct involvement in the functioning of the Commission will immeasurably enhance its effectiveness. The far-reaching ramifications of the Commission's mandate, described as the most challenging of modern human endeavours, will focus in the coming months on critical priority issues. Within the ongoing process of the United Nations restructuring and revitalization, it is hoped that the substance and mandate of the Commission will not be seriously undermined or its authority and special status in any way compromised.

At the centre of the Commission is the question of the new and additional resources needed to support the wide-ranging programmes envisaged. The international donor community and financial institutions are collectively urged to heed the call of Agenda 21 for the realization of the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent, for without adequate commitment the implementation process will be seriously jeopardized.

The earth increment for the tenth replenishment of the International Development Association covering the period 1993-1995 will definitely provide an additional volume of resources. Likewise, donor countries need to consider possible earth increments in the regional development banks in developing countries, namely, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and also in bilateral assistance programmes. As we look further at the financial follow-up to Rio, the envisaged restructuring of the Global Environment Facility must be seen in perspective, particulary in respect of additional resources for special environmental conventions still to come, such as those on desertification and

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forests. We attach great importance to the creation of an intergovernmental negotiating committee to elaborate the convention of the international framework to combat desertification.

The new Commission's central role will be to monitor the implementation of Agenda 21 by Governments and United Nations agencies. It also calls for consideration to be given to the establishment of a high-level advisory board consisting of eminent persons knowledgeable about the environment and development. When all is said and done, however, the success of the Earth Summit, as noted by a well-known scholar, would:

> "ultimately be determined not by what was said there but by what countries and international agencies did afterwards".

The bottom line is money. Lewis Preston of the World Bank summed it up well at Rio:

> "The question is not whether we can afford to do it. The question is: Can we afford not to do it?"

Mr. SWE (Myanmar): The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) will be remembered as a defining moment in history. From the Rio summit has emerged a global consensus and a political commitment, taken at the highest levels, with regard to development and environment cooperation. The international community is being presented with a historic opportunity to forge a new and equitable partnership. This opportunity must not be lost. We must work together and take necessary follow-up steps so that the spirit of Rio will be kept alive and the consensus reached will be given practical effect.

Much needs to be done by the Assembly as a follow-up to UNCED. The three documents adopted at the Summit - namely, the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Forest Principles - provide the broad framework for the global partnership that all of us aspire to. These documents, we hope, will be adopted in their entirety. The Assembly must also determine the specific procedures and organizational modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In this regard let me highlight some areas on which my delegation places special emphasis.

The Commission on Sustainable Development should be a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council. While it is logical to limit the size of the Commission to ensure efficiency, it should be large enough to take into account the need for equitable geographical representation. Since the Commission stands to benefit from the participation of the entire international community, States Members of the Organization or of its specialized agencies that are not members of the Commission should be given observer status, enabling them to participate fully and effectively in the deliberations of the Commission.

(Mr. Swe, Myanmar)

The functions of the Commission should be well defined. In our view these should include the following. First, it should monitor progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 and activities related to the integration of environment and development goals. Secondly, it should review progress in the implementation of the commitments contained in Agenda 21, particularly those related to the provision of financial resources and transfer of technology. Here let me emphasize that my delegation regards the provision of new, adequate and additional financial resources and the transfer of technology as central to the effective implementation of Agenda 21. We therefore regard this as one of the most important functions of the Commission. Thirdly, it should review on a regular basis the adequacy of funding mechanisms, including targets where applicable.

We regard capacity-building, particularly in developing countries, as extremely important. We should indeed like to see the Commission monitor the progress achieved in attaining the objectives regarding capacity-building set forth in Agenda 21. We should also like to see the envisaged Commission on Sustainable Development forge a strong, interactive relationship with the international financial institutions. It is our hope that the Commission will monitor the activities of these institutions in relation to the implementation of Agenda 21.

Agenda 21 addresses the pressing problems of today and exhorts us to make necessary preparations to be equal to the challenges that will face us in the future. It is in fact a blueprint to save planet Earth and it needs the full support of the entire international community. Organs, organizations and agencies of the United Nations system have a central role to play in support of Agenda 21. We therefore see merit in the recent decision of the

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Administrative Committee on Coordination to establish an inter-agency committee on sustainable development, entrusting it with the task of allocating responsibilities for implementing Agenda 21. Efficient coordination of the organs, organizations and agencies of the United Nations system for the implementation of Agenda 21 deserves our full support.

While the importance of the Commission on Sustainable Development cannot be overemphasized, there are other areas of importance which require the attention of the General Assembly. I speak of the establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the preparation of an international convention to combat desertification in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification. Given the fact that approximately 3 million people died in the mid-1980s as a result of droughts in sub-Saharan Africa, desertification and drought are problems that require the urgent attention of the international community.

The commitments made at Rio need to be conscientiously fulfilled by all if we are to achieve sustainable development for the common good of mankind. Concrete actions need to be taken at the national, regional and international levels. The Chairman of the Myanmar delegation, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is also the Chairman of the National Commission on Environmental Affairs of the Union of Myanmar, reiterated in his address to the General Assembly on 5 October Myanmar's firm commitment to the cause of environment and sustainable development and affirmed our readiness to shoulder our responsibilities in keeping with the spirit of Rio.

Allow me briefly to apprise the Assembly of our views on environment and our national endeavours as a follow-up to UNCED.

Myanmar fully subscribes to the concept of sustainable development. A central tenet of this, in our opinion, is the protection and conservation of

(Mr. Swe, Myanmar)

the environment in the national endeavour for socio-economic development, taking fully into account the twin objectives of environment and development. In this endeavour, the living standard of the people, particularly of the rural population, will be raised through integrated rural-development schemes, while healthy human living conditions will be promoted. Efficient use and conservation of energy will be promoted. Environmental legislation will be strengthened in all pertinent sectors. Public awareness and mass participation will be fostered and stimulated. Forest resources will be managed in a sustainable manner and reforestation and afforestation will be actively promoted.

We regard poverty as both the cause and the effect of environmental degradation. Poverty alleviation, therefore, figures prominently in our national agenda. As part of this agenda, the Government of Myanmar has embarked on an ambitious Programme for the Development of the Border Areas and National Races. The border areas, mostly populated by ethnic national races, have traditionally been economically and socially backward owing to difficult geographical terrain, poor transport and poor communications.

(Mr. Swe, Myanmar)

To remedy this, the Government has initiated an integrated rural development programme, which includes infrastructure building, the introduction of modern agricultural practices, income-generating schemes and the provision of agriculture extension services, health services and education facilities. By providing a whole range of economic and social services the Government not only aims at alleviating poverty but also hopes that the introduction of modern agricultural practices will do away with the environmentally wasteful method of slash-and-burn agriculture, which endangers the fragile ecosystem in these areas. To give renewed impetus to the programme and to administer it, the Government has since the Rio Summit set up a separate ministry.

Forests constitute a valuable economic resource for Myanmar. Accordingly, the sustainable management and conservation of forests occupy a place of importance in the national environment policy. Sustainable production of forest resources and conservation of biodiversity are assured by a Forest Working Plan, which is revised every 10 years to sustain the resilience of the forest ecosystem. Complementing this is an afforestation programme whereby 36,000 hectares are planted annually. This programme has been reinforced by a scheme for planting fast-growing trees for fuel wood. Since Rio, 11 million trees have been planted countrywide with full public participation. We are also engaging in a nationwide public-awareness campaign stressing the need to preserve and protect the environment. The Government has recently laid down effective measures to increase protected areas fivefold. Arrangements are also well under way to complete the necessary domestic procedures for an early ratification of the Conventions on Biological Diversity and on Climate Change, which we signed at Rio.

(Mr. Swe, Myanmar)

Before I conclude, I wish to comment on one of the important documents of the Rio Summit - the non-legally binding authoritative statement of principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. We are proud to be associated with the efforts which culminated in its adoption, and, as a country rich in forest resources, we place special emphasis on that document. The forest principles contain all the elements necessary for the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests. In our view, these principles provide an adequate basis for international cooperation on forests.

The current session of the General Assembly can make a lasting contribution to the cause of sustainable development. It can do much to keep the spirit of Rio alive and to build on the political momentum achieved there. It is now time for all of us to work together in a cooperative spirit and to fulfil our commitment in good faith. Then, and only then, can we hope to have a sustainable future for all of us.

Mr. PADILLA (Philippines): The intimate linkages of the various elements that spell economic well-being or economic deterioration in the world are well known. Everybody understands, for instance, that the incapacity of countries and private firms to negotiate new loans because of their external-debt record limits their capacity to purchase factories and equipment that incorporate new technologies. This limitation constrains them from producing competitive export goods. The consequent constriction of income from international trade reduces national budgets. This, and the need to meet heavy external debt and debt-service obligations, severely cripple the capacity of developing countries to provide basic services to their peoples. This inability to provide for basic needs exacerbates poverty, and poverty

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inevitably exacts a great toll on nature. The poor will seek to feed themselves and their families by burning forests for tillable land or by fishing by wantonly destructive means.

We could go on citing example after example of such intimate linkages of economic and social realities. One important linkage that nobody now denies is that between the environment and development. To say anything more on this linkage is to stress the obvious beyond measure.

The global assertion of that significant interconnection was the raison d'être of the unprecedented meeting of world leaders in Rio de Janeiro last summer. That was what moved the General Assembly to formulate the monumental resolution 44/228, which mandated the convocation of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). That is what is foremost in our minds now as we discuss the importance of implementing fully, promptly, and effectively the agreements we reached at Rio.

At Rio, we signed the framework Conventions on Biodiversity and on Climate Change. We formulated the principles contained in the Rio Declaration. We adopted Agenda 21. Earlier speakers have noted that Rio was a definitive moment in the history of international cooperation. In 1945, we agreed to seek the means to maintain peace and security in our world. Subsequently, we adopted a Charter on the rights of men. In Rio, we built on these human rights and viewed them in the context of our common heritage and home: Mother Earth.

Of the many points we agreed upon at Rio, and which delegation after delegation has spoken of since last Monday, the Philippine delegation today wishes to stress a few: first, the right to development and the human face of development; secondly, the categorical imperative of international

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cooperation; thirdly, the financing of Agenda 21; fourthly, the transfer of technology; and, fifthly, institutional coordination.

UNCED's recognition of the right to development, we think, was one of Rio's most important achievements. We believe that the right to development proceeds very logically from every man's right to life. If a man has a right to life, he also has a right to that which preserves and perfects that life.

To that end, economic and social development should be seen as a sine qua non for the preservation and perfection of life. What is true for the individual is true for nations. From the human being's right to life and development proceeds the right of peoples and nations to development.

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

We are pleased to note that the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 manifest a human-centered approach to development. Not too long ago, I am told, there were some in the United Nations who wanted to view economic issues from a purely economic perspective. They felt that any explicit expression of man's central role in development was an unwelcome intrusion of the philosophical into the purity of economic theory. This view could not be farther from reality. Economics is a man-centred discipline. Finance, trade, investment, debt relief: all these issues become meaningless without reference to the individual human being.

The International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade was a milestone in development thinking. The Strategy is based upon the importance of man in all development.

We in the Philippines are convinced of the paramount importance of the human being in the hierarchy of political, social and economic values. We feel that in any conflict that could possibly arise, involving a choice between men and the environment, our unqualified choice would be for the human being. We should therefore strive to prevent such critical choices from ever having to be made.

I turn to the subject of international cooperation. Man is not only at the centre of all development efforts; he is also the fundamental objective of all international cooperation, be it cooperation for international peace and security or cooperation for economic growth and development. Incidentally, the distinction that I have just made fades in the light of another truth we hold dear, that there can be no true peace and security in our world without economic and social development. Pope Paul VI's words have been quoted often: "Peace has a new name: development." We cooperate not only for the

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welfare of nations and States, but ultimately for the people, the human beings, who make up these nations and States.

Let those great countries blessed by God with political might and economic power realize that their achievements are due to the talent, industry and dedication of the individual men and women in various disciplines - from agriculture to finance, from scientific theory to applied technology, from factories to universities. Let them recognize that when they sit down to formulate macroeconomic policies for their countries they are inevitably also touching on the lives of millions of other human beings throughout the world. Such is the magnitude of their responsibility that they should not be remiss and wanting in human compassion.

Let me say, however, that the statements in this debate of the representatives of the European Community and Japan, the United States and other industrialized countries show that there is compassion, there is concern, there is a momentum of cooperation. The momentum generated by UNCED should not be lost.

There is a need for international cooperation to follow up the decisions and agreements reached in UNCED, not only for those issues specifically mentioned in chapter 2 of Agenda 21, "International cooperation to accelerate sustainable development...", but also for the implementation of all the commitments of the Rio Declaration, all the programmes incorporated in the 40 chapters of Agenda 21 and all the provisions of the Conventions on biodiversity and climate change.

Cooperation, of course, begins with the fulfilment of one's specific duties at home. Formulating sound policies and managing their implementation are of such obvious importance that they hardly need mentioning. But there is

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obviously a need to concentrate on certain habits and traditional actions that have been described in Agenda 21 as unsound, such as unsustainable patterns of consumption, which exhaust nature, and of production, which pollute and degrade the environment.

Besides action on these points, which can be addressed domestically, there is a need for thoughtful, serious, politically willed cooperation in breaking down unreasonable trade barriers, promoting capital formation through direct foreign investments and establishing definitive solutions to the external debt problem. These matters cannot be dealt with by one Government alone; they are by nature bilateral and multilateral concerns, and it is thus that they should be treated.

I come to financing, one of the most difficult issues related to Agenda 21. We have agreed on elaborate and apparently feasible programmes and projects calculated to pursue the goal of sustainable development during the last decade of the twentieth century and well into the twenty-first.

But translating blueprints into a desirable edifice requires the wherewithal. None of the programmes and projects described in Agenda 21 will come to fruition without adequate funding. It must be noted that for these programmes the developing countries are expected to draw from their own resources to the extent of 80 per cent of costs. Only a meagre 20 per cent is expected from international community contributions.

It is therefore critical that the Global Environment Facility be funded with new, additional and adequate resources, that its scope be broadened and that its governance be made more representative. But the Global Environment Facility is not enough. For developing countries to help themselves initially, it is critical that they be relieved of the debt burden that weighs

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heavily upon their economies; that higher levels of official development assistance (ODA) be granted them; and that there be significant help from International Development Association funds for those whose low incomes seriously impede their growth.

As we read in Agenda 21,

> "Funding for Agenda 21 and other outcomes of the Conference should be provided in a way that maximizes the availability of new and additional resources and uses all available funding sources and mechanisms." (A/CONF.151/26, (Vol. III), para. 33.14).

My next subject is transfer of technology. Environmentally sound technologies and technologies for sustainable development continue to be developed. One cannot expect impoverished developing countries to adopt such technologies, which cost money, unless they are shared as grants or unless they are purchased, either at big discounts or with funds borrowed on concessional and preferential terms.

(Mr. Padilla, Philippines)

On the subject of institutional arrangements, if Agenda 21 is to be implemented properly and efficiently it is important that a competent organization take the initiative in following up the provisions of the Agenda, evaluate the extent of its implementation, and make recommendations to specific agencies and Governments whenever necessary and relevant.

Initially, the Philippines held that a revitalized Economic and Social Council could take care of coordinating the implementation of UNCED's decisions. We felt that the Council itself could create - should it consider this necessary - a committee from its own membership to deal with the concrete implementation of General Assembly and Council decisions. We believed that there was no need for a proliferation of bodies. However, eventually we joined the consensus on the establishment of a Commission on Sustainable Development.

We hope that this Commission will operate in the broader context and in the spirit of a progressive process of restructuring and revitalizing the United Nations system, of which the Secretary-General spoke in his keynote address at this debate.

A paper on the nature and functions of this Commission has been prepared by the Group of 77 to clarify its position on the relevant consensus provisions of Agenda 21. We agree with the Group's position and we do not feel any need to expound on its details further at this moment.

As we speak of procedures and modalities of follow-up and follow-through, it is important to remember at all times the ultimate goal not only of UNCED but also of all our efforts in the United Nations: the perfection of man's life now and in the future.

Mr. MARTINI HERRERA (Guatemala)(interpretation from Spanish): On behalf of the delegations of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras,

(Mr. Martini Herrera, Guatemala)

Nicaragua and Panama, I have the honour to speak on the agenda item "Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development". We are grateful for the timely and satisfactory introduction of the report. We the countries of Central America attach special importance to this subject. Our Presidents and high-level representatives were present at this event of world-wide significance.

Central American participation in the last preparatory meeting before UNCED was very active. It was a catalytic event for our countries, and our Presidents and representatives to be able to participate actively and support the contents of Agenda 21 as negotiated, and thus share in the agreements on the protection of the environment which UNCED produced.

Today we Central Americans continue to be concerned by the way in which the subject of the environment might be dealt with. We are following up the establishment of a commission on the environment which came out of the Rio de Janeiro Conference and which is to ensure compliance with the agreements reached at the Conference. The commission must be set up in accordance with genuinely equitable geographical distribution, in which subregions like Central America are adequately represented. By that I mean that the direct participation of our region must be ensured. Of necessity the commission must reflect the concerns of all countries, both developed and developing, but especially those of the developing countries because of their need to struggle against misery, poverty and ignorance. It must comply effectively with the right to development, which those of us living in countries which have not yet attained it, in particular the small countries, must be able to achieve as a matter of urgency.

The commission must have available to it the necessary assistance and

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infrastructure so that it can comply effectively with the functions agreed to in chapter 38 of Agenda 21, and to be able to make the necessary inputs, reports and studies of high quality and content, which can serve our countries in adopting adequate development decisions and policies in accordance with the Rio de Janeiro agreements.

The important tasks of the commission suggest three areas of activity which have to be carefully outlined: it should be a follow-up agent to the actions of the United Nations and the other international organizations in implementing Agenda 21 and promoting sustained development; a mechanism for reviewing the flow of financial resources to the developing countries in support of their efforts to attain sustainable development; and a forum with high-level participation for discussing, forming a consensus on and taking decisions regarding the subjects contained in Agenda 21. Its activity must be directed towards assistance, transfer of technology and exchange of information; it should not be an organ of judgement and condemnation. Emphasis must be placed on international cooperation; we must bear in mind that every country has its own origin and history but that we all have a common future.

We cannot fail to emphasize our concern at the limited results of the conference in respect of the financial resources which are so essential if we are to be able to clean up the environment. It is our feeling that there is no reciprocal commitment between those whose economies are stronger and who could make a bigger contribution to solving environmental problems and all the rest of us who are so short of the resources and technology required to do so. It follows from the results of UNCED that most of the financial resources to be allocated to environmental matters will have to come disproportionately from the South, from the developing sector.

(Mr. Martini Herrera, Guatemala)

The environment is too important to the survival of our planet, and a greater political will on the part of all States Members of the United Nations is essential for us to be able to fulfil the goals and objectives envisaged and adopted in Rio. Its importance was emphasized by the impressive participation by the Heads of State or Government of most countries of the world. This clearly reflects existing concern at the deterioration of the environment, environmental pollution, the use and abuse of natural resources by the most industrialized countries, as well as the desire to establish a genuine international cooperation that would allow the developing countries to give impetus to acceptable and ecologically sustainable development without condemning their peoples to backwardness and primitivism.

It is imperative to point out that 80 per cent of the world's population lives in the developing countries. Most live below the extreme-poverty line, with privations of every kind and lack of access to health services, drinking water, education and fuel. In the rural areas, human beings simply subsist; they enjoy neither the conveniences nor the facilities of the urban areas, and far fewer of the common medicines that the peoples of the developed countries take for granted.

It is for these sectors of the population that it is essential to formulate strategies and policies to assure their economic growth and social development, in conditions of equality, dignity, security, well-being and independence, with respect for their cultural heritage and their lifestyles. We cannot accept as a final result of the Conference unilateral and compulsory measures imposed by those whose development since the industrial revolution has in large measure, been at the expense of the world environment. If there

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is to be genuine international cooperation, how can the Rio commitment be imposed on the developing countries unless the developed countries show the will to implement the same rules, support the process of integral development and facilitate cooperation by allocating resources and adopting measures that will improve the international economic environment?

We, the Central American countries, are aware of the need to protect the environment, and we have the political will to do so, as was proved by the fact that the Presidents of the region at their summit meetings have entered into commitments to protect it. Every country of the subregion has set up a national commission that cooperates and coordinates closely with the Central American Commission on the Environment. National and subregional strategies contain important segments for that purpose. The Special Plan of Economic Cooperation for Central America also includes efforts to promote and improve the environment, and support is given to Governments to design a strategy to be followed at the world conference.

Concerted efforts by the countries of Central America have yielded positive results, such as the establishment of a Central American system of protected areas; the signing of a regional Convention that forbids any cross-border movement of toxic wastes; and the Central American Convention on biodiversity, which was signed recently in Managua, Nicaragua. It is important to emphasize the actions agreed to in relation to indigenous peoples and their development, and the national and regional plan submitted by the First Ladies of Central America entitled "Women, Environment and Development". These programmes will also require the necessary financing to become reality.

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Central America participated actively in the meeting held in Mexico that led to the Tlatelolco Treaty, which contains the Latin American and Caribbean strategy on the subject. Programmes of exchange of debt in kind have been tried, and their benefits or limitations should be assessed in order to determine their desirability. In cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), we have developed an aggressive programme designed to protect the environment, the Maya Route, which promotes tourism with an ecological conscience. All of these will require sufficient and varied resources to enable us to advance significantly in this vital field.

We Central Americans belong to one of the few remaining regions of the planet with a tropical rain forest, home to a wealth of biological variety whose potential has yet to be fully studied. We listened with great interest to the proposal made by Canada to finance three model forests in developing countries, and we feel that our region offers ideal conditions for that project to be viable and beneficial for our planet. We urge this sister country, in coordination with our Governments, to give serious study to the possibility of financing the establishment of one of these model forests in Central America.

UNESCO has declared as a patrimony of humankind several zones and places containing cultural and indigenous cities and centres, as well as the biosphere reserve of the Platano River in Honduras, considered the largest in Latin America after the Amazon. We must accordingly conclude that its jungle renders a service to the survival of our planet, as does the Amazon region in the southern hemisphere of the American continent. And yet this service goes

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unnoticed in the world. While international, commercial and multilateral banking is concerned with debt payment, including interest, no recognition is given of the debt that the developed countries owe to all those less developed countries, which, by their very nature, generate the oxygen needed for human survival and serve to lessen the noxious effects of carbon monoxide. This service should be recognized in a just and equitable manner, as required by circumstances.

In order to be able to protect the environment adequately, we need concerted action and international solidarity. In this context, we support the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77, as expressed by his Ministers at the last ministerial meeting, to the effect that the environment is a concern of humankind and that its problems must be solved through multilateral cooperation based on common but differentiated responsibility and with a balanced perspective.

It is accordingly necessary to negotiate and define the parameters, strategies and policies that will give life to the concept of sustainable development.

We also need the commitment of both the wealthy and less wealthy nations to cooperate more fully and struggle to narrow and eventually close the ever-widening gap between the two. It is unacceptable that 20 per cent of the world's population should have a profusion of goods and services available to them while the rest of the world subsists in a harsh environment, without sufficient access to education, health care, housing, drinking water and basic services.

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We should not seek to change indigenous cultures; rather we should give them access to education - which will lead to an awareness of the need to protect the environment - and to life with dignity. It is essential to promote the education of women and children, and for women to participate in the decision-making processes affecting the integral development of their societies, because it is women who bear primary responsibility for the care, nurturing and quality of family life.

How are we to persuade our rural populations that they are not to continue to cut down trees or burn fields for purposes of agricultural production or the feeding of livestock, unless we can provide them an adequate income that will guarantee not only their survival but a better life?

Any strategy that ignores that reality is doomed to failure.

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The item on Agenda 21 is of paramount importance, as the strategy for the next century must be broad and include, inter alia, development guidelines, mechanisms and priorities, the modalities and allocation of responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, and the urgent need for the transfer of environmentally sound technology. Yet, we are concerned that this technology and cooperation for development will be insufficient and/or limited, or that the anticipated costs of acquiring such technology will make it inaccessible, which would make international efforts ineffective. Our countries, in extremely difficult circumstances that are well known, have contracted an external debt that we must renegotiate in the light of the realities that gave rise to them, and we cannot therefore incur more debt in the same way.

The United Nations should consider mechanisms to strengthen capacity-building in the developing countries by effective technical cooperation programmes and transfer of know-how and technology. The possibility should be considered of holding workshops and arranging exchanges of information among the various regions of the world so as to share experience and avoid the errors committed in the past in order to improve the national capability to protect the environment and its ecosystem. For it is the indigenous peoples who must be educated and trained to be able to make a rational and responsible use of their natural resources and, from the trade and exploitation of these resources, to receive an income that will enable them to exercise their fundamental rights recognized in international instruments.

Our countries must not be condemned to poverty, ignorance and backwardness. What is required therefore is the commitment of the developed

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countries to permit free access to their markets, eliminate protectionist measures and respect fair prices for the products of the developing countries. The developing countries are not asking for alms; they are asking for what is genuinely theirs by law.

We must also emphasize the importance of promoting and encouraging close cooperation between the developing countries, as we must face our internal problems and find our own solutions. We, the developing countries, must assume our historic responsibility over our future, which implies economic, social and political stability leading to general well-being in conjunction with environmental awareness and responsibility. We must forge our destiny and carry it out, and invest our resources rationally and productively for the benefit of our peoples.

We, the developing countries, have serious problems and very critical aspects that we have to solve. In Central America our political independence was threatened in recent years and some countries embarked on fratricidal wars that led to an ever-increasing degree of poverty. Owing to structural adjustment programmes, social sacrifices have been enormous. Our budgets were even reduced for education, health, social services and environmental clean-up.

In Latin America and the Caribbean today we are being threatened by the resurgence of cholera. The whole world is being attacked by a series of epidemics and other conditions and diseases in addition to the usually critical health problems. Our economic indexes have been lowered to levels below those of 20 years ago and yet today we are facing a challenge - our integrated development in a better and more just world, in which the riches of

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nature are being defended and preserved, but without sacrificing human beings, which are the most wonderful miracle of Creation. The international community faces a challenge in future - to create a lifestyle in harmony with nature, which should be our commitment for the twenty-first century.

Mr. PENNANEACH (Togo) (interpretation from French): "The Earth is unique! Let us take care of it together!"

This inspiring slogan is both an acknowledgement of the dangers threatening our good old Earth, the common heritage of mankind, and an urgent appeal to joint action to save it and better distribute its many riches.

The irrepressible euphoria long caused by the numerous benefits of scientific and technical progress for social, cultural, political and economic life is receding increasingly today against the repeated and destructive assaults on the environment by man's economic and industrial activities and by patterns of consumption and social organization.

The objective limits of scientism, or better, an apology for the conquest and transformation of nature are increasingly noticeable today to such an extent that, to paraphrase the famous French writer, Rabelais, we are tempted to state that science without conscience only brings ruin to the environment and to development.

Quite revealing in this regard is the report of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on the state of the environment from 1972 to 1992. This report quite rightly emphasizes the various forms of environmental deterioration and their impact on development. Indeed, research carried out over the past two decades indicates that the usual atmospheric pollutants have been compounded by numerous organic components and trace metals that have been

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released into the atmosphere by human activity. The pollution of the atmosphere has had effects on human health, on vegetation and on various materials.

As to the depletion of the ozone layer, which is a world problem requiring worldwide solutions, the report of UNEP reveals that this phenomenon might have undesirable consequences for the Earth's climate and, among other things, might result in an increase in ultraviolet rays reaching the Earth's surface. Exposure to these rays might lead to a weakening of the immune system and could increase the incidence or seriousness of some illnesses.

We should also note that the world increase in concentrations of hothouse gases in the atmosphere and the resulting climate changes could have serious repercussions on natural ecosystems.

Moreover, the UNEP report emphasizes that some human activities have a direct impact on coastal areas, and that the over-exploitation of marine biological resources entails, among other things, the danger of sharply reducing fish supplies.

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We want to place special emphasis on the report's important conclusion that soil degradation and desertification are preventing countries from producing sufficient food to meet the needs of their peoples and thus reducing regional and world food-production capacities.

Coming after the Stockholm Conference, which blazed the trail towards better joint management of the environment, the Rio Conference on Environment and Development has already gone down in history as a new acknowledgement of our common destiny and as a crucial stage in the quest for ways and means to promote development with a truly human dimension.

While the Conference did not respond fully to the legitimate concerns and expectations of the developing countries, it is none the less true that it succeeded in reaching very useful conclusions: first, recognition of collective responsibility for the deterioration of the environment, of the vital need to take urgent measures to improve environmental protection and of the dynamic interaction between environment and development; and, secondly, establishment of a solid foundation for sustainable development, through the adoption of important decisions, including the Conventions on climate change and biological diversity, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development - a true environmental charter - and, above all, Agenda 21, a relatively consistent and ambitious programme of action.

The results of the Rio Conference were even more meaningful because they were based on a new approach to development: a more integrated and multidimensional approach.

As the Secretary-General stresses in his report on the work of the Organization,

"[The Rio Conference] opened new paths for communication and cooperation between official and non-official organizations working towards

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> developmental and environmental goals [and] led to an enormous increase in public awareness of the issues that were tackled in the process - an awareness that ought to facilitate the adoption of policies and the allocation of additional resources to fulfil the task". (A/47/1, para. 76)

It will no longer be possible to consider any viable development programme without incorporating the crucial environmental dimension.

If Rio is not to remain just another manifestation of international solidarity, generous intentions and fine promises, it is absolutely essential that we concentrate on the speedy implementation and efficient functioning of the machinery for follow-up and evaluation, and on mobilising the necessary financial resources. Like the Secretary-General, we urge the donor community to release the necessary resources in order to serve the common interests of the entire world. In that connection, we urge that a pledging conference for financing Agenda 21 be convened as soon as possible.

Furthermore, the delegation of Togo considers that urgent decisions must be taken at this session of the General Assembly, in particular with respect to an international intergovernmental negotiating committee to draft an international convention on desertification, and with respect to the Commission on Sustainable Development, to an international conference on sustainable development for small island developing States and to a world conference on sharing experience in the integrated management and sustainable development of marine and coastal zones.

The dimensions and gravity of drought and desertification are clearly stated in the report of the Secretary-General on the campaign against those scourges. The report says that 84 per cent of the 5.2 billion hectares of arid land that are potentially productive are exposed to drought and

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desertification. It is estimated that some 3.6 billion hectares, or 70 per cent of the total, are currently threatened by various forms of deterioration of the land, especially desertification, which will adversely affect the well-being and future of those who live there.

In that context, it goes without saying that it is a matter of great urgency to draft an international convention on desertification. In the view of my delegation, and as many other African delegations have already stressed in this Hall, the negotiating process for that convention should meet the following requirements:

First, it must take due account of the close relationship between desertification and drought.

Secondly, in view of the relatively short time-frame for completing the convention - 18 months from January 1993 - it would be desirable for preparations to be carried out with great care and discipline. The members of the negotiating committee should be persons of great competence. During the preparatory work, the committee should have the benefit of contributions from and the expertise of United Nations agencies competent in the sphere of desertification and drought, particularly the United Nations Environment Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office and the World Meteorological Organization.

Thirdly, countries directly affected and concerned by desertification and drought, as well as the least developed countries, should have access to financial and technical facilities to enable them to take an active part in the entire negotiating process. In that connection, a fund should be created without delay, and substantial contributions should be made to it.

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Fourthly, attention should be given to strengthening the warning and monitoring system for desertification and drought.

Fifthly, in preparing his progress report on the negotiations, the chairman of the intergovernmental committee should indicate whether the work had advanced to the point where the convention could be completed in time or whether an extension was necessary. The idea is to ensure a sound convention.

Finally, the drafting should take into due account the concerns and problems of the countries affected by desertification and drought; at the same time, it should proceed in a spirit of constructive dialogue and consensus, so as to facilitate the subsequent ratification of the convention and its rapid entry into force.

By the terms of chapter 38 of Agenda 21, a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development should be established in accordance with Article 68 of the Charter of the United Nations in order to ensure the effective follow-up of the Conference, as well as to enhance international cooperation and rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues and to examine the progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and international levels. It is clear from that chapter that the Commission on Sustainable Development has a central role to play in the follow-up of the Rio Conference. In that connection, my delegation believes that in its functioning it should meet the following requirements:

First, the Commission secretariat should be sufficiently competent to provide the best assistance to the Commission in the fulfilment of its mandate. It should be a separate entity led by an Under-Secretary-General reporting to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

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Secondly, special attention should be given to ways and means of facilitating the transfer of environmentally sound technology to developing countries and the mobilization of financial resources and information from, and effective participation by, non-governmental organizations. In this connection, chapters 33, 34 and 38 of Agenda 21 should be put into effect.

Thirdly, the Commission on Sustainable Development should also follow closely the implementation of programmes to eliminate poverty and hunger, which bring about destruction of the environment.

Fourthly, like many African delegations such as those of Burkina Faso, Benin, Gabon and others, we should like the first session of the Commission to be held in 1993 in New York.

Fifthly, the Togolese delegation supports the proposals of the Group of 77, especially the proposal that the Commission should have 53 members.

In any case, the Commission on Sustainable Development should act as a watchdog, at the appropriate time identifying obstacles to the implementation of Agenda 21 and formulating recommendations in that regard.

In the exchange of experience on integrated management and sustainable development in marine and coastal zones, we must not lose sight of the difficult problem of coastal erosion, to which many coastal developing countries fall victim.

In my delegation's view, there must be a world conference on this important problem by the end of 1993, in accordance with the recommendations in chapter 17 of Agenda 21.

Sustainable development also requires that environmentally sound management of toxic chemical substances and dangerous waste materials and

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radioactive waste prevent, among other things, traffic in such materials to developing countries. This is especially timely because most countries are not equipped to process such products.

The strengthening of the role of major groups is also provided for in Agenda 21 as another effective means of fostering sustainable development. Women, non-governmental organizations and farmers are the target groups that should be given substantial assistance to enable them to make their full contribution to development.

With this in view, we must ensure swift implementation of the following measures.

First, an evaluation by the Secretary-General of the role of all the bodies of the United Nations system, especially those that emphasize the contribution of women to the attainment of objectives set for development and environment, and the formulation of recommendations to strengthen their capacities.

Secondly, the elaboration of programmes designed to eliminate negative images, stereotypes, persistent conduct and prejudice against women and to bring about a heightened awareness of the importance of women as consumers and promote their active participation in decision-making.

Thirdly, a study by the United Nations system of ways to strengthen existing proceedings and mechanisms to enable non-governmental organizations to participate in policy planning, decision-making and the implementation and evaluation of the activities of each body.

Fourthly, a study of levels of financing and administrative support for non-governmental organizations, as well as the degree of their participation in the implementation and effectiveness of plans and programmes, with a view to increasing the role of these organizations as social partners.

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Fifthly, the development of environmentally sound agricultural techniques in order to increase yields while maintaining soil quality, recycling nutritive elements, saving water and energy and combating parasites and noxious weeds, as well as studies on types of agriculture that require many resources and those that require few, in order to compare their productivity and durability.

The implementation of the ambitious Agenda 21 goes far beyond the major challenges we shall face in the twenty-first century, in the hope of creating a world in which all can live well.

Gaining an increased awareness that we all belong to the same planet and that we must make joint efforts to prevent it from deteriorating amounts to establishing the milestones for a new vision of interdependence and international cooperation for development.

We must today act to save mankind and its habitat. As Georges Duhamel said, "With due deference to zealots who favour new technology and those who profit from inventions, however admirable, our role - that of the United Nations - is carefully to consider changes in habits and to counter the shortcomings of a civilization that is now devouring itself". In order to do that, we must act, and act quickly.

In the interest of all mankind, let us see to it that this exceptional upsurge of solidarity is accompanied by concrete action that can give sustainable development a fourfold dimension: equitable distribution of the world's wealth; reduction of the gap between rich and poor countries; final elimination of poverty and hunger; and consolidation of the balance between mankind and its environment.

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Mr. BUTLER (Australia): Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

The Earth Summit was the culmination of two years of extremely complex and sometimes contentious negotiations. Those negotiations were supported effectively by the UNCED secretariat and the secretariats of the climate change and biodiversity intergovernmental negotiating committees.

Australia congratulates the Secretary-General of the Conference for his able and enthusiastic management of the largest international meeting ever.

We reiterate our appreciation to the host country, Brazil, for the excellent facilities provided to the Summit.

UNCED was of historic importance for two central reasons: it responded to the urgent need to move to a sustainable path for global development, and it gave birth to an unprecedented spirit of cooperation and consensus. Our task now is to maintain that historic momentum.

The Australian environment is characterized by a varied range of sensitive ecosystems, rich in biodiversity, with a large number of species found only in Australia. At the same time we rely economically on resource-based industries.

Accordingly the Earth Summit and its outcomes are important for Australia. The Brundtland report, the UNCED preparations and the Rio Conference itself encourage the Australian community - not just environment organizations, but industry, indigenous groups, development organizations and others - to consider in depth, and to participate actively in discussions on, and approaches to, sustainable development.

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In 1989 the Australian Government established a number of national working groups to make recommendations for sustainable development, in particular economic sectors, and to deal with cross-sectoral issues. These working groups draw on the expertise of environmentalists, industrialists, scientists and other academics, and other community interest groups. We have made substantial progress in the introduction of appropriate policies designed to achieve sustainable development. The UNCED outcomes will provide additional guidance to our future efforts.

UNCED fulfilled the challenging mandate set by resolution 44/228. It addressed the multitude of interlinked issues that are the conditions for sustainable development - the use of resources, the avoidance of pollution, poverty alleviation and international trade, and the building of financial, technological and human capacities.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is an excellent starting point for further international efforts to tackle a subject which is extremely complex in both economic and scientific terms. The urgency of precautionary action on climate change cannot be underestimated, as our colleagues from low-lying island States and coastal areas know very well.

Australia has moved quickly to institute consultations on measures we need to take in order to ratify the Convention. We are confident that many of these measures are already in place. We encourage other countries to ratify the Convention so that it can enter into force as soon as possible. In the meantime, Australia is keen to participate in the ongoing meetings of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to prepare a programme of work for the Conference of Parties.

The Convention on Biological Diversity is the most significant

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development in decades in the field of conservation and the sustainable use of living resources. It contains agreements on conserving the Earth's species, ecosystems and genetic diversity, and also promotes cooperation on the sustainable utilization of genetic resources. Work is now underway in Australia towards the ratification of the Convention, and we look forward to its early entry into force. Australia is also developing a national strategy for the protection of biodiversity.

The high number of signatories to these Conventions is evidence of the international community's commitment to action on the vital issues they address. This should facilitate their early entry into force.

The varying priorities of the delegations to the UNCED Preparatory Committee for the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development are reflected in the cautious balance of the text. In our view, the text includes the essence of a number of important sustainable-development principles, and the Declaration also represents the current consensus of the international community on guiding principles for sustainable development. We must hope that, by providing guidance for the implementation of Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration will assist in building confidence and strengthening cooperation between developed and developing countries on sustainable development, and by this means contribute to stronger, shared views in the future.

The statement of forest principles, like the Rio Declaration, reflects a fragile consensus. But it, too, contains some important principles. Action on the forests chapter of Agenda 21 should facilitate the implementation of the statement.

Agenda 21 reflects a consensus of the international community concerning the actions that need to be taken at all levels to achieve sustainable

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development in all sectors. In many cases, these actions are to be taken through other intergovernmental conferences and meetings tasked with developing further agreed policies on sustainable development with respect to specific issues. Agenda 21 is also described in its preamble as being open to revision in the future. Thus, it carries the seeds of its own development and adaptation to changing needs.

Agenda 21 is a comprehensive and valuable resource. In the United Nations system, Agenda 21 should be regarded as a key development strategy with which individual programmes must be made consistent. Many of the Agenda 21 recommendations will reflect objectives already pursued in the individual programmes of various United Nations bodies. Australia hopes that not only the international organizations and national Governments, but also local authorities, industry and community organizations will become familiar with Agenda 21 and help promote its importance.

Australia intends to continue assisting developing countries to build human, institutional and technological capacities for implementation of the UNCED outcomes. The Australian overseas development assistance programme already places a strong emphasis on poverty alleviation, training and population issues, which are important to sustainable development. Assistance in the development and implementation of sustainable land and marine resources policies already have a strong place in Australia's overseas aid programme. We have also built ecological sustainability requirements into all elements of our overseas aid programme.

Australia is committed to the provision of new and additional financial resources for developing countries through the Global Environment Facility (GEF), to address agreed environmental activities of global significance that

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provide global benefits. Along with other GEF participants, we have supported the need to review the governance of the GEF in line with proposals already under way.

Australia made an early commitment to contribute additional funds for environmental activities. Last year, in the lead-up to UNCED, Australia announced a new $80-million, four-year environment assistance programme to promote ecologically sustainable development through bilateral, regional and global cooperation programmes. We also announced a commitment to provide $30 million to the GEF over seven years.

At the 1992 South Pacific Forum, Prime Minister Keating announced that part of our contribution to the GEF would be used to support the GEF's South Pacific biodiversity conservation programme. He also announced that our support for regional climate monitoring activities would be increased. In 1991, Australia established an International Tropical Marine Resource Centre to provide training in tropical marine resource management.

What should the General Assembly do to facilitate early follow-up to UNCED? Australia hopes that the General Assembly will strongly endorse the UNCED outcomes. They are the result of lengthy and complex negotiations, the substance of which should not be revisited or reopened here.

But it is also necessary to lay the groundwork for carrying forward specific UNCED initiatives. For example, a major task of the General Assembly at this session will be to create the new Commission for Sustainable Development. The Commission will play a crucial role in the integration of environment and development activities throughout the United Nations system. It will have responsibility for the implementation of Agenda 21 at the international, national and regional levels, and for the review of the financing of Agenda 21.

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We believe the Commission should include a high-level segment which would constitute both a venue for political decision-making and a forum for debate on and discussion of progress towards the implementation, development and updating of Agenda 21.

Australia attaches considerable importance to the open and effective participation of relevant non-governmental organizations in the Commission. Rules of procedure must be established for the Commission based on those applying to the UNCED process to ensure such participation.

The activities of all United Nations and non-United Nations multilateral organizations in the environment and development fields, including the international, financial and trade institutions, are relevant to the Commission's mandate. The participation of specially appointed representatives from those agencies in the work of the Commission will be vital to its success.

Australia attaches great importance to government plans for sustainable development, and would strongly encourage the submission of reports by national Governments on such plans and on any difficulties they encounter in implementing them. Countries should report on all aspects of Agenda 21, including, in the case of developed countries, their initiatives to assist developing countries. Such exchanges of information will prove vital in the proper evaluation of the contents and implementation of Agenda 21,and will benefit all participants.

Australia supports the establishment of an intergovernmental conference on straddling stocks and highly migratory species. There are real and pressing problems of stock depletion which may be resolved only if more effective cooperation mechanisms can be developed in relation to those

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stocks. We believe that members of the international community should work to convene the conference as soon as possible. Some fundamental questions on the implementation of rights and obligations under the Law of the Sea Convention and the strengthening of conservation and proper management of fisheries need to be addressed urgently. The work of the conference is of particular importance to developing coastal States, and we urge that some mechanism be found to assist their participation in the conference and in the preparatory committees leading up to it.

The General Assembly should establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of a convention on desertification. Australia hopes that the committee will address the underlying causes of desertification, but it would not be desirable for the General Assembly to attempt to anticipate the substantive provisions of such a convention before the committee began its work. We consider the main United Nations agencies having a central role in supporting the negotiations to be the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We also support the convening of a conference on sustainable development for small island States. Such a conference should provide a valuable opportunity for small islands of different regions to share their experience and consolidate information networks on the development of sustainable development plans relevant to the particular difficulties they face. We look forward to working with the countries of the Alliance of Small Island States to consider the modalities for that conference.

The Rio Conference was a turning point of historic importance; that is clear. But precisely because it had that character it represented not the

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end, but the beginning, of a long and complex process. The concept of sustainable development has introduced a new dimension to the traditional North-South focus of United Nations economic activity. Our future approaches to these issues must be different and linked by our vital, mutual interest in the preservation of an environment and the achievement of development which can be sustained for future generations. The Commission on Sustainable Development has a central role to play in this process.

Earlier this year we took a major step in the right direction, a direction we all need to follow and must follow. Our task is to build on that now, for the future.

Mr. CAMILLERI (Malta): There is general agreement that this year's United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro reached out to the global community at large more forcefully and effectively than any previous United Nations conference has ever done. This is due to many factors, both substantive and organizational. They include the unprecedented number, range and level of participants; the immense scope of the issues tackled, together with the impressive manner in which their complexity and interrelatedness were conceptualized, the direct relevance of the core subjects to individuals throughout the world; and the major organizational effort of those involved - in particular, the Government and people of Brazil.

What is rightly regarded as the outstanding success of Rio is therefore the product of relevance, commitment and imagination. These qualities must continue to be available in abundance if Rio is, in the long run, to be seen as the watershed of a long and complex collective endeavour rather than as an isolated expression of a concerned but ultimately passive humanity.

(Mr. Camilleri, Malta)

At the beginning of the follow-up process to Rio it is perhaps useful to mention briefly those things which the Conference did not do, since through their absence these elements contributed to the successful outcome. Rio avoided two tempting extremes, one arising from cataclysmic scenarios of an irrevocably deteriorating natural environment and the other from the confrontational contraposing of environmental and developmental concerns.

Avoidance of these extremes was in itself the result of the most significant characteristics of the whole UNCED process: a sharp focus on the human dimension, a solid grasp of realities and a firm notion of democratic involvement. In addition to guaranteeing the success of Rio, these characteristics also contributed to the widening and strengthening of the process of multilateralism.

Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration captures uniquely the right tone and balance of the UNCED message, with its simple assertion that

> "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." (A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), p. 8)

This spirit of serene commitment pointing towards a common objective must continue to guide the international community, especially at these initial post-conference organizational stages, when the pressures of parochial and sectoral interests tend to come to the fore.

Rio imposed obligations on all of us, at the level of individuals, of States, and of the international community as a whole. The definition of these obligations takes account of a vast range of factors and situations, of specific interests and universal concerns, of needs and capabilities, of historical facts and current conditions.

(Mr. Camilleri, Malta)

The specific burdens imposed upon different sectors of the international community as a follow-up to Rio may vary in the light of such considerations. What must not be lost sight of is the fact that the final goal is equally vital to all: a healthy, viable and prosperous planet for future generations to inherit.

Issues related to finance and technology permeate most of the action programme elaborated under Agenda 21 and must inevitably become the dominant themes of the eventual follow-up process. In a number of ways finance and technology may be regarded as two sides of the same coin. Together they constitute the indispensable means through which we can all achieve our defined objectives. Both are available in impressive amounts, though not always in the right places or utilized effectively; both are dynamic elements capable of expansion or deviation according to uses and priorities.

(Mr. Camilleri, Malta)

In a nutshell, the outstanding success of Rio was the agreement by the international community to harness all available finance and technology in the collective endeavour towards sustainable development. It is to be hoped that, more than a formal consensus decision, Agenda 21 represents a genuine and determined commitment, a commitment that encompasses both the global dimensions of the objectives of sustainable development and the nature of the sacrifices that are called for at individual and community levels in the necessary reordering of priorities, of life-styles and of economic management.

The task of building the institutional set-up and launching the administrative process needed for the effective implementation of the decisions taken at Rio falls to the current session of the General Assembly. In considering the question of institutional arrangements, we are privileged to benefit from the report of the Secretary-General in document A/47/598, a report marked by the clarity, comprehensiveness and intellectual grasp of all relevant issues that we have become accustomed to expect from our Secretary-General.

I wish to commend three particularly helpful elements of the report: its succinct definition of the functions and the related structures of the proposed Commission on Sustainable Development; its consideration of the Commission's work within the broader picture of the United Nations system's evolving capacity in the economic, social and related fields; and its recognition that the necessary secretariat support structure should be an integral element in the current revitalization and reform efforts within the whole United Nations Secretariat.

My delegation welcomes the emphasis the Secretary-General places in his report on the role of the proposed high-level advisory body on sustainable

(Mr. Camilleri, Malta)

development, and supports the idea that the work of that body should be integrated with that of the existing Committee for Development Planning.

We also attach importance to the Agenda 21 recommendation that the Commission on Sustainable Development should encourage the participation of non-governmental organizations, including those of industry and business and the scientific communities. We see in these aspects the necessary guarantee that the follow-up process to the Conference will remain closely linked to the fundamental needs and concerns of the global community.

Agenda 21 looks beyond the functional aspects of the follow-up to the Rio decisions by envisaging a process of overall review and appraisal at the highest policy-making levels. The General Assembly, as the principal policy-making and appraisal organ of the United Nations system, will be undertaking this task at given intervals, with the first special session for the purpose to take place no later than 1997.

My delegation nevertheless feels that the United Nations system could provide a more regular and consistent review and appraisal process detached both from the day-to-day functional concerns of the Economic and Social Council and the new Commission and from the wide-ranging responsibilities of the General Assembly itself. As my Prime Minister explained in his address to the General Assembly on 28 September this year, this task could be assigned to a revitalized Trusteeship Council, which progressively, as its traditional tasks are phased out, could take over the role of guardian and trustee of the common heritage of mankind.

In addition to institutional issues, the UNCED follow-up process requires this session of the General Assembly to take a number of other decisions,

(Mr. Camilleri, Malta)

notably in connection with the convening of the global conferences on straddling and migratory fish stocks and on the sustainable development of small islands, as well as with the launching of negotiations on a framework convention on desertification.

As a small island State, Malta attaches special importance to the conference on the sustainable development of small islands, which is proposed to be held in Barbados next June. Together with other members of the Alliance of Small Island States, Malta played an active, and we believe a useful, role in the UNCED process.

We are particularly proud of the role we have played in generating the necessary awareness that led to the adoption of the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Small islands are particularly vulnerable to climate change, especially through its effect on the seas, with which their lives are so intimately linked. Nevertheless, climate change, and especially its impact on global warming, is not a phenomenon that exclusively affects small islands, as the concerns with desertification, for example, clearly underline. The question of climate change and the catalytic role small islands have played in developing awareness about it therefore constitute one example of how, on issues related to environment and development, the special concerns of some are intertwined within the general concerns of all.

The commonality of our concerns and destiny within a single global community, which stretches both horizontally in space and vertically in time, is indeed the most essential and profound message emerging from Rio. It is up to us to generate the necessary courage, wisdom and determination to accomplish those tasks whose completion is called for through the acceptance of this message.

Mr. ERDŐS (Hungary): The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) opened a new chapter in the history of man's relationship to nature. The Earth Summit was unprecedented in the scope of its work, the level of participation, the scale of governmental and non-governmental involvement and the extent of its public impact. In the light of the many opposing interests that had to be brought to bear, the Earth Summit achieved more than had been expected.

Never again shall we be able to talk about "environment" and "development" as separate terms. Due to an endangered environment and to limited resources, it will be necessary in the 1990s to promote growth according to the principles of sustainable development. However, translating the concept of sustainable development into specific international and national programmes is more difficult than was thought at the beginning of the process.

Aware of the great importance of global environmental problems and greatly concerned about the state of its own environment, Hungary followed the UNCED process with high expectations from the very beginning. When Hungary signed the Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity it was motivated not only by responsibility for the conditions prevailing on its own territory, but by concern for the state of the common heritage of humankind as well. At the same time, to deal with the environment in a development context presents not only an enormous chance but also difficult challenges for countries like mine that have been undergoing a historic transition.

Unforeseen and unforeseeable radical changes have taken place over the past two years in the post-communist countries. Those countries now have to face not only the problems of technological and infrastructural gap, economic

(Mr. Erdös, Hungary)

recession and social tensions that inevitably accompany the transition process, but also the tragic environmental legacy of the former régimes.

One such example is the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros Barrage System on the river Danube. Back in 1977 the Governments of Hungary and Czechoslovakia signed a treaty on the construction and joint operation of the barrage system, without taking into account its possible environmental effects. During the years that followed the commencement of the project the Hungarian public's attention began to focus more and more on the need to prevent a further forcible interference in our habitat and to protect the country's and the region's unique environment and natural resources. This led to a popular reconsideration of ecological values, which are not always measurable in economic terms, and to acceptance of the key idea that in the prudent management of natural resources sustainable development is a basic principle.

(Mr. Erdős, Hungary)

Because of the severity of the ecological danger that completion of the barrage system on the Danube would pose, the Hungarian Government was left with no option but to terminate the 1977 Treaty in accordance with a resolution of the Hungarian Parliament. It did so in May this year. The Government of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic and the Government of Slovakia still view the 1977 Treaty as being in force and continue its implementation, including the unilateral diversion of the Danube border river to the territory of Slovakia.

The Hungarian Government is concerned about the irreversible damage that the diversion of the Danube will inflict upon the region's environmental resources. The available and potential drinking water reserves of millions of people are threatened.

Beyond the ecological threats, the diversion of the Danube infringes upon Hungarian sovereignty and territorial integrity, violates the provisions of the peace treaties concluded after the First and Second World Wars, which determine the main course of navigation in this section of the Danube as the border between Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and deprives Hungary of its lawful jurisdiction over a major economic lifeline. These actions are at variance with the spirit of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) process and with the provisions of the United Nations Charter. Unfortunately, they also help revive the passions of post-communist nationalism.

The Charter of the United Nations, customary international law and several bilateral and multilateral treaties binding on Czechoslovakia and Hungary oblige these countries to negotiate in good faith and in a spirit of cooperation. Hungary has been, and continues to be, ready for meaningful

(Mr. Erdös, Hungary)

negotiations with Czechoslovakia on how to reconcile the conflicting sets of interests. We are convinced that it is possible to find a mutually acceptable solution to this problem in accordance with both international legal and environmental norms, taking due account of ecological and economic considerations alike.

There is a national consensus in Hungary that the state of our environment should be improved and further damage to it prevented. Hungary is committed to an open, participatory and monitored management of its environment. For this purpose, an institutionalized form of communication between Government and society is to be established. It will include full access to information and a systematic and legalized role for non-governmental organizations.

We are living in a period characterized by a remarkable, though uneven, development of the world economy on the one hand, and by reckless plundering of natural resources and the destruction of the environment on the other. Fully aware of this challenge, Hungary is ready to cooperate with all countries in making the UNCED follow-up process a success.

The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 have established a new dimension of long-term international commitments. We would like to see the current legal and institutional mechanisms of global and regional cooperation developed further so as to enable environmental considerations to influence economic, social and scientific programmes, too.

We agree that follow-up institutions are needed to determine the global and regional activities resulting from the Rio Conference. The overall objective of integrating environment and development issues at national, subregional, regional and international levels should be stressed, with a view to ensuring the implementation of Agenda 21 in all countries.

(Mr. Erdös, Hungary)

We welcome the establishment of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development. In our view, the follow-up to UNCED should be fully incorporated into the ongoing revitalization of the United Nations economic and social sectors. During this process, careful consideration should be given to the mandate and functions of the high-level Commission as well as to its relationship with other organizations and agencies in the United Nations family, especially the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). We think that in this follow-up process the role of the regional Economic Commissions should be strengthened as well.

Undoubtedly, steps should be taken to implement Agenda 21 through, inter alia, the initiation of negotiations leading to the elaboration of binding international instruments. Hungary favours a complex approach, by which global challenges, commitments, one's own economic capacities and international assistance efforts are all carefully taken into account when working out national obligations. The viability of this approach has already been demonstrated during the negotiations on the Convention on Climate Change.

The current session of the General Assembly has the important task of adopting concrete decisions related to the UNCED report and to a number of specific recommendations of the Rio Conference. I can assure the President, that the Hungarian delegation will participate actively in the deliberations on this item.

Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka): The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, was a most significant event in human history. In this discussion on UNCED we are addressing one of the major issues before the current session of the General Assembly.

(Mr. Kalpagé, Sri Lanka)

UNCED emphasized the concept that the environment is the common concern of humanity. It also stressed that the lasting solution to global environmental problems lies in sustainable development. We agreed at UNCED that these problems should be redressed through multilateral cooperation based on common but differentiated responsibilities, common action and a balanced perspective. Such cooperation should ensure that the protection of the environment, economic growth and development, and poverty eradication are mutually reinforcing. It is imperative to integrate development and environmental concerns. The welfare of the human being should be at the centre of our concerns.

The international community's follow-up action to UNCED should be in keeping with these concepts, developed and agreed to at Rio. It is important that the momentum of our efforts to reach the goals envisaged in the Rio Declaration be maintained in a spirit of cooperation.

In charting our course towards sustainable development, we should bear in mind the agreed principles enunciated in the Declaration as well as in the United Nations Charter. To achieve sustainable development globally, Member States must have the political will and commitment to work out and implement national strategies that will promote sustainable growth and lifestyles. To this end, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.

(Mr. Kalpagé, Sri Lanka)

International cooperation is essential to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer to developing countries, on concessional and preferential terms, of technologies, including new and innovative technologies.

Cooperation between States to promote a supportive and open international economic system cannot be over-emphasized. In this regard the successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations is crucial to facilitate the generation of financial resources through trade. The financial resource requirement for the implementation of Agenda 21 is extremely large. A substantial flow of new and additional resources is necessary to facilitate the mobilization of resources in developing countries.

It is important to set up effective financial mechanisms to facilitate the flow of financial resources for the implementation of global as well as national projects. The Global Environment Facility, as one of the financial mechanisms for the implementation of Agenda 21, must be restructured as discussed at Rio.

The cooperation and initiative of all countries and all sections of society, including women, youth and indigenous people as well as other major groups and non-governmental organizations, are vital in the achievement of sustainable development. The problems of poverty, hunger, ill-health and illiteracy and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being can be addressed successfully only through a global partnership for sustainable development.

The immediate task before us is to establish the institutional arrangements to carry forward the implementation of Agenda 21. My delegation supports the setting up of a Commission on Sustainable Development, in

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accordance with Article 68 of the Charter of the United Nations. In this regard, we endorse the views expressed by the representative of Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77. We believe that a highly qualified and competent secretariat support structure within the United Nations Secretariat is essential to facilitate the Commission's work.

In addition to the institutional arrangements, other issues requiring special action are desertification and the problems of small island developing countries. We support the establishment of an intergovernmental committee to formulate a convention on desertification. We also support the holding in June 1993 of the global conference on the sustainable development of small island developing countries.

The cooperation displayed at Rio must be nurtured. It must guide us on the road from Rio in the years to come. Let us hope that our cooperative efforts will make this planet a better place for everyone, everywhere.

Mr. CISSE (Senegal) (interpretation from French): The Earth Summit marked a historic turning-point in international relations by arousing an unprecedented awareness of the major importance of the environment to the world as a whole and the need to establish a new world order reconciling the interdependent and complementary imperatives of maintaining peace and international security, protecting the environment, promoting economic growth and development and eliminating poverty. It is agreed that the Conference gave a new impetus to the process of creating a global partnership on the environment and development.

In this respect, addressing the General Assembly on 30 September this year, His Excellency President Abdou Diouf said:

"the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro last June has given us reason

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for greater optimism. Indeed, while far from perfect, it worked for the taking into account, in the long term, of all the concerns and perspectives of the world. It is not an exaggeration to say that after Rio nothing is the same as before in approaching environmental problems and their interrelationship with development. What is even better, the change that has taken place thanks to a real awareness of the globalization of mankind's problems could be the dawn of the new world order." (A/47/PV.18, p. 18)

The results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) will bear fruit if specific action is taken quickly to follow up the commitments made at the highest level regarding implementation of Agenda 21, particularly as regards financial resources and the transfer of technology; the establishment under Article 68 of the Charter of the United Nations of a high-level Commission on Sustainable Development; and the drafting of an international convention to combat desertification in countries experiencing serious drought or desertification, particularly in Africa.

I turn first to financial resources and technology transfer. We would insist that the developed countries prove their political will to fulfil the undertakings they made when they supported the adoption of Agenda 21. In this respect, my delegation hopes that the pledging conference to take place during this session will be the occasion for the countries that can do so to provide information about their initial financial commitments. Not only should those developed countries which have not yet attained the 0.7 per cent of gross national product set by the United Nations as the goal for official development assistance do so as quickly as possible; above all, the specific commitments in chapter 33 concerning new and additional financial resources for the developing countries must be respected.

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Moreover, existing mechanisms and financial sources should play a key role in the implementation of Agenda 21. In this connection, the International Development Association (IDA), during the tenth replenishment of its resources, should be able, with the assistance of the World Bank, to finance integrated national environmental projects through the establishment of the Earth increment.

As for the Global Environment Facility (GEF), its restructuring, its democratic and transparent administration and the periodic evaluation of its activities will enable it to become the major financing mechanism for Agenda 21. In this respect, Senegal will play an active role at the meeting scheduled for December in Côte d'Ivoire within the framework of the restructuring of the GEF mechanism.

As for the role that the specialized agencies are to play in helping the developing countries implement the Rio de Janeiro decisions, the delegation of Senegal welcomes the Capacity 21 initiative launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which is designed to assist developing countries in preparing and administering their own development plans. This initiative, involving an expenditure of more than $100 million, will help these countries to give concrete effect to Agenda 21 and to launch effective national programmes by increasing the expertise of developing countries' national institutions, which will enable them to follow up on the commitments entered into at Rio de Janeiro.

Capacity 21, in order to bear fruit, should, when implemented, operate on the basis of an integrated approach, taking into account the priorities and objectives of the recipient countries with regard to the environment and

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development. Moreover, the role of regional banks in financing Agenda 21 should not be overlooked. Lastly, the mobilization of resources for the implementation of Agenda 21 should go hand in hand with debt-relief measures and increased private financing as well as more investment. Along these lines, the convening of an international conference to finance development would play a decisive role.

I should now like to touch on the no less important question of institutional arrangements, basically the establishment of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development. This Commission will be a driving force in the attainment of the main objectives of Agenda 21 and will promote the strengthening of international cooperation for sustainable development. It will have a decisive role in promoting the integration of the environment and development at the United Nations system level and in reviewing the progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 at the national, regional and subregional levels, including financial contributions and transfers of technology to the developing countries.

The Commission should have a clear and specific mandate, avoiding any duplication with other organs and taking into account the process for restructuring and revitalizing the United Nations system in the economic and social fields. Moreover, its composition should reflect an equitable geographical distribution. Coordination of the activities relate to integrating environment and development at the level of the United Nations system is vital. Likewise, the secretariat to be established should consist of highly qualified persons chosen on the basis of their competence and with the broadest possible geographical distribution. This secretariat should be led by a high-ranking official under the direction of the Secretary-General.

(Mr. Cissé, Senegal)

As regards the headquarters of the Commission, the Government of Senegal has taken note with interest of the offer of the Government of Switzerland.

The delegation of Senegal hopes that the current negotiations will lead to the adoption of a resolution in which the General Assembly will determine the specific organizational modalities for the work of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development, in particular its membership, its relationship with other intergovernmental United Nations bodies dealing with matters related to environment and development, and the frequency, duration and venue of its meetings.

A source of major concern for my delegation is the precariousness of the environment in Africa, exacerbated by the encroachment of deserts and the devastating drought which led to the death of approximately 3 million people in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s and which is currently inflicting enormous damage on the southern part of the continent. Despite national, regional and international efforts, particularly within the context of programmes such as the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel and the Sahara-Sahel observatory, the situation has worsened and has required large-scale global action. In this respect, the decision taken by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to establish an intergovernmental negotiating committee to draft an international convention to combat desertification, especially in Africa, has come just in time. The negotiations under way at the present session should enable the Committee to start its work in 1993 so as to complete the drafting of the convention before June 1994. The convention should contain provisions on measures designed to put an end to and reverse the trends towards increased desertification as well as measures to control and prevent drought situations.

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Clearly, the implementation by developing countries of such a legal instrument will require firm commitments on the part of the international community to the mobilization of financial resources, the transfer of technology and the provision of assistance in training and data collection. In this context, the role of regional organizations such as the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel should be strengthened.

The delegation of Senegal wishes to reiterate the importance it attaches to other chapters of Agenda 21, in particular the beginning of an international process to review the principles on the protection of forests; on the convening, as soon as possible, of an international conference on migratory species and high-seas fishing; on the ratification and entry into force of the Convention on Climate Change; on the establishment before 1993 by all States of national plans of action for the integration of environment and development.

Lastly, we also believe that there must be a review in 1997, in the middle of the follow-up to Rio process, to evaluate the progress achieved, both within the United Nations system and at the regional and national levels, in implementing the decisions adopted at the historic Earth Summit. That evaluation should include the status of the implementation of the convention to combat desertification, which is to be drafted.

The PRESIDENT : In accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 52nd plenary meeting, on 2 November 1992, I now call on the Observer of Switzerland.

Mr. ROCH (Switzerland) (interpretation from French): Switzerland made a firm commitment to the process that culminated in the Earth Summit, held in Rio last June. In our view, the exercise was a success overall.

Rio was an extraordinary Summit meeting, marking the convergence of the issues of development, protection of the environment and efficient resource management. The wealth of exchanges of views throughout the Rio process, considerably enriched by the contributions of hundreds of non-governmental organizations, brought about a new way of thinking. Now it is up to us to create a new way of acting.

In this regard, we should like first to repeat the commitments we and the rest of the community of States made in Rio de Janeiro. We signed the Conventions on Climate Change and on Biodiversity, and adopted the Rio Declaration, the Statement on forests and Agenda 21. We hope the members of the General Assembly will formally adopt all the final documents of the Conference.

We believe that the next steps to be taken on the road to sustainable development are crucial. First, the "spirit of Rio" must be implemented in each of our countries. In Switzerland, the federal Government is currently reviewing Agenda 21 to identify all the recommendations that it must now take into account. At the same time, efforts are being made to involve local officials, as well as the population and non-governmental organizations in this work. Their support and their motivated, active participation are essential if we are to make the very important adjustments needed in a highly industrialized country such as ours. We hope before the end of the year to be able to identify a number of areas for priority action and to begin work on them.

(Mr. Roch, Switzerland)

It is now clear that one of our major actions will be to implement a series of measures to meet the objective of reducing emissions of gases causing the greenhouse effect.

Now more than ever, one of our objectives is to have environmental factors taken into account in the setting of prices and, in particular to use economic instruments such as a tax on carbon dioxide emissions, to protect the environment. Apart from the theoretical work involved in this approach - work that is by and large under way - there is the question of a minimum international harmonization to avoid trade distortions and guarantee the effectiveness of these instruments. We hope that a consensus will be reached as speedily as possible. We will spare no effort to this end, particularly in the European context.

This leads me to measures that should be taken internationally. First, Switzerland is convinced of the need to undertake without delay the work necessary for the development and implementation of the two Conventions signed in Rio. This afternoon in the Second Committee we will have the opportunity to return to questions concerning the Convention on Climate Change.

Switzerland is also convinced that the convention on desertification proposed by the African group could improve and facilitate international efforts to control land degradation. That is why it welcomes the forthcoming work on this new legal instrument, in whose elaboration it will participate actively.

Moreover, we attach the greatest importance to the establishment of a Commission on Sustainable Development, with a strong and substantial mandate, to be a future forum for constructive and effective debate on everything related to the implementation of Agenda 21. Overall, we welcome the

(Mr. Roch, Switzerland)

recommendations in this regard in the report of the Secretary-General on institutional follow up of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

More specifically, Switzerland supports the idea that the Commission should allow for the fullest possible participation of States, whether or not they are Members of the United Nations, and specialized agencies of the system. The choice of Commission members should reflect the criteria of equitable geographical distribution. Non-Member States should have observer status, defined in such a way that they may fully participate in its work. Non-governmental organizations, too, should be able to play an active part in the Commission's work. The model of cooperation developed for UNCED and its preparatory committees should serve as a basis for thinking about this matter.

The Commission should be supported by a secretariat of the highest calibre, particularly as it should be capable of providing considerable assistance to coordination efforts within the United Nations system, such as those of the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

We are fully aware that establishing the Commission and its secretariat raises numerous difficult questions at a time when the system and the Secretariat are going through an active phase of restructuring and revitalization. Moreover, the concept of sustainable development reinforces the interdependence of the specialized agencies and institutions responsible for work in this field. The harmonization and coordination of the various components of the system, the simplification of lines of decision-making and the avoidance of duplication are therefore more necessary than ever. These challenges, which are very important to us, require a certain flexibility at this stage. In this regard, we are ready to take an active part in the

(Mr. Roch, Switzerland)

negotiations soon to be begun under the chairmanship of Ambassador Razali, which we believe will have positive results.

As for financing Agenda 21, which will involve considerable additional costs, particularly for the developing countries, the Swiss Government, undertook during the Rio Conference to increase its official development assistance over time in order to play its full part in the necessary international effort.

Finally, I repeat an offer made by my Government: Switzerland would be pleased to contribute to the success of the follow-up of UNCED by hosting in Geneva meetings of the high-level Commission on Sustainable Development; by having the secretariat headquarters there; and by providing financial support.

I should like to make it clear that no country should be prevented from taking part in the Commission's work for lack of permanent representation in Geneva. Switzerland is prepared to make available in Geneva the necessary infrastructure to enable least developed countries without permanent missions in Geneva to take part fully in the Commission's work.

Switzerland is also prepared to make available the necessary funding to cover the travel expenses of representatives of least developed countries that do not have a permanent mission in Geneva, without excluding other countries. It will submit detailed proposals on the matter to the Group of 77 next week.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and its follow-up offer us a unique opportunity. We should give ourselves the financial and political means to seize this opportunity and to emerge from the vicious circle of underdevelopment and destruction of the environment.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Arabic): The representative of Czechoslovakia wished to make a statement in exercise of the right of reply. Before calling on him, I remind members that in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401 statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first statement and to 5 minutes for the second statement and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I call on the representative of Czechoslovakia.

Mr. KUKAN (Czechoslovakia): I wish to react to that part of the statment of my colleague the Permanent Representative of Hungary which dealt with the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros project. I shall use this opportunity to present the position of my Government on that issue.

The Gabcikovo-Nagymaros project is for a barrage system on the Danube jointly designed and agreed upon by Czechoslovakia and Hungary. While both parts of the project were intended to provide energy and to ameliorate navigation conditions, one of the main motives for the project has always been flood protection.

During the years following the signature of the 1977 treaty on this project, construction amounting to $1.5 billion was carried out, mainly on the Czechoslovak side of the project. When Hungary proposed first to slow down the work in 1981, invoking financial problems, and then, contrariwise, to speed up the termination of the project by 15 months, in February 1989, Czechoslovakia responded with understanding. In May 1989 Hungary decided without any consultation with Czechoslovakia to suspend the construction of the Nagymaros part of the project, which lies entirely on Hungarian territory,

(Mr. Kukan, Czechoslovakia)

and two months later also to suspend work on the Hungarian sector of the Gabcikovo part of the project, which is situated mainly on Czechoslovak territory, ignoring at the same time all damage claims by Czechoslovakia, which were based on relevant treaty provisions.

In October 1989 the Hungarian Parliament, invoking as a general argument the priority of ecological interests, decided to stop permanently the construction of the Nagymaros part of the project, and in April 1990 empowered the Hungarian Government to propose to Czechoslovakia the termination of the 1977 treaty, the dismantling of all construction carried out during those 12 years, and the restoration of the original state of the area. Since that time Hungary has insisted on this as the only subject for negotiations with Czechoslovakia, continuously refusing to discuss any other solution, including the possibility of revising the technical elements of the project, a revision which would be based on thorough studies undertaken by experts from both countries, with the participation of impartial experts.

The environmental impact of the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros project were thoroughly reevaluated by several expert commissions in Czechoslovakia. The result of those studies was that the best solution would be to complete the whole project in accordance with the 1977 treaty, with certain additional measures aimed at diminishing, or even eliminating, the identified undesired environmental impacts. No threat of an "environmental catastrophe", as so often referred to by Hungary, was found.

In order to obtain the complete picture, even the possibility of abandoning the project and completely rehabilitating the area was studied. It

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was concluded that, at this stage of the work, it is technically impossible to restore the original productive state of the territory, as far as the Gabchikovo part of the project is concerned.

Having duly considered the existing situation, the Czechoslovak Government decided in July 1991, after having previously notified the Hungarian Government, to proceed with a provisional solution, the so-called variant C of the Gabcikovo project. This consists of putting that part of the project into operation, at least the structures situated on Czechoslovak territory. This solution of last resort was the only possibile way of diminishing the great economic losses that Czechoslovakia has suffered as a result of Hungary's non-compliance with its treaty obligations. During the two and a half years of the delay, the economic loss for Czechoslovakia has been at least 15 billion crowns, that is, more than half a billion dollars. Even more than the financial aspect, we feel the burden of the urgent need for flood protection and for stopping the environmental deterioration of the area.

During the work on the provisional solution, Czechoslovakia was always ready to seek a solution to the disputed questions with Hungary, and welcomed the readiness of the Commission of the European Community to provide assistance and to chair a trilateral committee of experts. On 16 May 1992 Hungary declared the 1977 treaty unilaterally terminated, effective 25 May 1992. That act, contrary to the relevant rules of the law of treaties, is considered by Czechoslovakia to have no legal effect. The 1977 treaty of the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros project remains valid.

(Mr. Kukan, Czechoslovakia)

In August 1992 Czechoslovakia duly notified the Danube Commission about the final work in the bed of the Danube planned for the last part of October, which required the suspension of navigation for about 10 days. Owing to climatic conditions, this work can be done only in the autumn, when the water level is low.

Accordingly between 24 and 31 October a provisional closure dike was built in the river bed. The navigation channel was filled, and on 2 November was opened to navigation by the terms of the 1977 treaty. Nevertheless, Czechoslovakia did not start the reservoir, thus limiting the operation of the system to the navigation channel. The power plant was consequently not put into operation. The whole quantity of water again runs in the original river bed. The measures that have been adopted are of a provisional and reversible character. They do not exclude the possibility of putting into operation the whole Gabcikovo part of the project, including the construction on Hungarian territory.

The provisional solution and the construction of the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros project by the terms of the 1977 treaty cannot and do not produce any change in the border between the two countries. Indeed, the 1977 treaty contains an explicit provision in that respect.

At the tripartite meeting of the representatives of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Commission of the European Community held on 28 October 1992 in London, it was agreed that on a date specified by the European Community Commission on the basis of the report submitted by the tripartite fact-finding mission, all the work on variant C of the project would be stopped. A working

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group of experts, including specialists in environmental matters, hydrology and water architecture, will be set up immediately with the mandate to make an on-site inspection of the structures of variant C and to assess factors pertaining to all aspects of those structures.

Both Czechoslovakia and Hungary have committed themselves to submitting the whole dispute connected with the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros project, in all its aspects, to binding international arbitration or to the International Court of Justice.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate the strong interest of the Czechoslovak Government in solving the issue through meaningful and businesslike negotiations. We believe that political slogans or accusations of any kind will not help this cause.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.